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SUBJECT: ISRAELI NSA EILAND ON IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT,
IRAQ, AND SYRIA

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (S/NOFORN) Summary: Israeli National Security Adviser Giora Eiland told Representative Christopher Shays, Representative Jim Marshall, and the DCM that Iran's main goals are to acquire nuclear weapons, support Hizballah and other proxies, and to increase Iranian influence in Iraq. Eiland said that the upcoming IAEA report on Iran may provide a good opportunity to seek sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council. Without some deterrent, Iran could reach full nuclear capability in three to four years, predicted Eiland. He said that the next six months are a critical period in which Iran will likely overcome all technical difficulties in the nuclear process, thus allowing storage of nuclear material at various sites across the country. Eiland said he expects Iran to continue to seek influence in Iraq and to use this influence to bargain with the U.S. on the nuclear issue. Eiland said that a stable Iraqi government must be established and that any U.S. withdrawal must be gradual and at the request of the new Iraqi government. End summary.

Eiland Urges UNSC Sanctions Against Iran

¶12. (C) Eiland claimed that Iran's objective of acquiring a nuclear weapons capability has become an issue of national pride and not just the desire of President Ahmadinejad. Obtaining a nuclear program would assist Iran in exporting the Islamic revolution and allow Tehran to threaten the entire region. For example, they could threaten Israel if it responded to attacks from Hizballah in the north.

¶13. (C) In response to Rep. Shays' question of how to succeed with Iran, Eiland said that if IAEA Director General Mohamed El Baradei's upcoming report cites Iran's failure to comply with international requirements, it would provide a good opportunity to bring the issue before the UN Security Council. He went on to say that the French had indicated to him that they would not consider unilateral sanctions against Iran, making a UNSC resolution necessary. Eiland explained that Iran is sensitive to sanctions; he dismissed speculation that Iran would respond by pulling oil from the market.

¶14. (S/NOFORN) In response to questions from both Rep. Shays and Rep. Marshall on whether a viable military option exists. Eiland responded, "We don't know all the sites and we don't know what we don't know." He went on to say that air strikes that lasted a few weeks could substantially disrupt any Iranian nuclear program.

¶15. (C) Rep. Marshall asked Eiland for his assessment on the time it would take for Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Eiland predicted three to four years to reach full military capability, which he defined as having more than one warhead, an effective delivery system, and a secure command and control system. He said that the next six months are critical because during that time the Iranians will likely overcome the remaining technical difficulties, enabling them to generate nuclear fuel and store it at various sites throughout the country.

Iranian Influence in Iraq

¶16. (C) In response to Rep. Shays' request for views of Iraq, Eiland replied that Iraq is below the Palestinians, Iran, and Lebanon on Israel's priority list because there is little it can do to influence events there. He assessed that in spite of severe political differences, the Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish populations all want a united Iraq. Eiland cautioned that one of Iran's main goals is to increase its influence in Iraq by increasing the influence of the Iraqi Shia, which Iran will then use to bargain with the U.S. on the nuclear issue. When asked by Rep. Shays what kind of positive steps Iran could make with regard to Iraq, Eiland said they could secure the Iran/Iraq border, prohibit assistance from Hizballah to terror groups in Iraq, or stop support to insurgents in Iraq.

¶17. (C) Rep. Shays said that while success in Iraq could be

defined as a competent military and government that is able to move forward and grow economically, some experts say that as soon as the U.S. leaves Iraq, extremists will claim victory. Eiland replied that everything will depend on how a withdrawal is carried out, but agreed that there is a danger that insurgents will claim success. He said that in order to avoid this perception, there must be a stable government in Iraq and a withdrawal must be gradual and at the request of the Iraqi government.

Syria: Asad Seeks Rewards

18. (C) In response to questions on Syria from both Rep. Shays and Rep. Marshall, Eiland said that President Bashar al-Asad is frustrated because he believes he has not been rewarded for attempts to secure his borders and for successfully withdrawing from Lebanon. Eiland suggested that Asad hopes Syria will avoid sanctions, will move off the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and will gain support for a return of the Golan Heights.

19. (U) CODEL Shays did not have the opportunity to clear this cable before departing post.

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